

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14 T-03 AID-20 DPW-01

IO-12 EUR-25 VO-03 SCA-01 OMB-01 RSR-01 /134 W

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R 140840 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8617

INFO USIA WASHDC

DOD

USDEL FRANCE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 4138

E. O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: AFSP, CVIS, VS

SUBJECT: GVN PRESS RELATIONS

REF: STATE 044670

1. SINCE THE CEASE- FIRE WENT INTO EFFECT IN VIETNAM JANUARY 28, TENSION BETWEEN THE GVN AND THE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS GRADUALLY BUILT UP UNTIL IT REACHED A CRISIS LAST WEEK WHEN IT APPEARED FOR A TIME AS IF VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE UPI STAFF WOULD BE REQUIRED TO LEAVE.

2. THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS FOR THE TENSION:

A. FIRST, THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO THE PRG/ DRV DELEGATES, WHICH IN THE EARLY WEEKS OF THE CEASE- FIRE WAS THE BASIS FOR ALMOST DAILY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE PRESS AND VIETNAMESE MILITARY POLICE.

B. SECONDLY, SURREPTITIOUS COVERAGE OF COMMUNIST- HELD ENCLAVES, PARTICULARLY IN DINH TUONG BY A WIDE RANGE OF NEWS- PAPER, MAGAZINE, AND TELEVISION REPORTERS. PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO AND OPPOSED TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS " FREE PROPAGANDA" FOR THE COMMUNISTS, THIS KIND OF COVERAGE INCREASED THE NERVOUSNESS

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OF GVN INFORMATION OFFICIALS.

C. THIRDLY, THE PROBLEM OF VISAS FOR CORRESPONDENTS, WHICH HAS BEEN LONG- STANDING, BUT WHICH BECAME MORE ACUTE IN RECENT WEEK. WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER FACTORS THESE THREE ASPECTS ARE THE MOST NOTEWORTHY.

3. IN REFERENCE TO ACCESS TO THE PRG/ DRV, AGREEMENT HAS NOW BEEN REACHED BETWEEN THE GVN AND THE PRESS CORPS REPRESENTED BY THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS ASSOCIATION, UNDER WHICH THE GVN PLANS TO TRANSPORT THE ENTIRE PRESS CORPS TO CAMP DAVIS THE MORNING OF SATURDAY, MARCH 17, TO CONFRONT THE PRG/ DRV SPOKESMAN IN A PRESS CONFERENCE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE PRG/ DRV HAS AGREED TO THIS INITIAL EXPERIMENTAL PRESS CONFERENCE. HOPEFULLY, THE CONFERENCE WILL PRODUCE MORE IN- DEPTH CRITICAL REPORTING OF THE PRG/ DRV LINE THAN HAS BEEN POSSIBLE UP TO NOW.

4. MEANWHILE, COVERAGE OF COMMUNIST ENCLAVES CONTINUES, THE MOST RECENT EXPLOIT HAVING BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY MISS FITZGERALD AND GREENWAY. (SEE CAN THO 0029, REPEATED TO DEPARTMENT AS SAIGON 3963). DISQUIETING RUMORS NOTWITHSTANDING, WE KNOW OF NO CORRESPONDENT WHO IS CURRENTLY IN TROUBLE OVER SUCH COVERAGE.

4. AS REGARDS VISAS, OUR JUDGEMENT IS THAT THE PRESSURE HAS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY EASED, EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF NBC WHICH APPARENTLY IS STILL IN THE GVN DOGHOUSE AS AN AFTERMATH OF THE RON NESSEN AFFAIR. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT NESSEN WAS IN ANY CASE FINISHING HIS TOUR IN SAIGON AND WAS IN THE VIEW OF MANY OF HIS FELLOW CORRESPONDENTS NOT JUSTIFIED IN HIS BEHAVIOR TOWARD PRESIDENT THIEU. NORMALLY, A DEPARTURE OF THIS KIND BRINGS DOWN UPON THE EMBASSY PRESS OFFICE A FLOOD OF TELEPHONE CALLS AND PROTESTS FROM THE PRESS. IN NESSEN' S CASE. THERE WAS NONE.

6. AT THE SAME TIME, NBC IS STILL ATTEMPTING TO OBTAIN A RE- ENTRY VISA FOR SAIGON- BASED STAFF CORRESPONDENT ROBERT JONES

AND HIS WIFE DENBY, STYMIED IN HONG KONG FOR MORE THAN TEN SAYS, AS WELL AS BILL DOWELL, UNABLE TO OBTAIN A VISA IN NEW YORK.

7. WE HAVE NOW BROUGHT THIS MATTER TO THE ATTENTION OF GVN
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INFORMATION AND FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS ON TWO OCCASIONS WITH

THE HOPE THAT BOTH GENTLEMEN WILL OBTAIN THEIR VISAS SINCE WE SEE NO PARTICULAR REASON WHY THEY SHOULD NOT.

4. AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, UPI'S STAFF NOW APPEARS TO BE OFF THE HOOK REGARDING VISA RENEWALS (SEE SAIGON 3786, MARCH 8), BUT ACTING BUREAU CHIEF DONALD DAVIS WILL LEAVE. DAVIS HOWEVER, HAS NOT OBTAINED GVN AUTHORIZATION TO REMAIN HERE UNTIL MARCH 22, ONLY FOUR DAYS BEFORE HE HAD PLANNED TO DEPART AT THE END OF HIS ASSIGNMENT HERE.

9. THUS, IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE ONLY TWO AMERICANS CORRESPONDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN OBLIGED TO LEAVE VIETNAM BY THE GVN, NESSEN AND DAVIS, WERE BOTH VERY NEAR TO THE END OF THEIR ASSIGNMENTS HERE.

10. AS IN THE PAST, THE EMBASSY KEEPS A CLOSE WATCH ON THE STATUS OF AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS HERE AS A MEANS OF FORESTALING SMALL PROBLEMS THAT COULD QUICKLY BECOME LARGE PROBLEMS, AND IN KEEPING WITH US POLICY CONCERNING FREEDOM OF INFORMATION.

11. VISA DIFFICULTIES HAVE BEEN AN INTERMITTENT PROBLEM HERE FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, BUT DESPITE THE PRESISTENT FOREBODING OF MANY CORRESPONDENTS WHO SEEMS TO BE CONVINCED THAT THE GVN IS WAITING EAGERLY TO THROW THEM OUT OF VIETNAM EN MASSE, THE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS HERE STILL NUMBERS MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED PERSONS, MORE THAN HALF OF WHICH ARE AMERICANS, VIETNAMESE, OR THIRD- COUNTRY NATIONALS WORKING FOR THE AMERICANS.

12. AT THE MOMENT, THERE APPEARS TO BE WHAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS A QUEASY DETENTE BETWEEN THE FOREIGN PRESS HERE AND THE GVN. A MAJOR ACTOR IN THE DRAMA IS HOANG DUC NHA, COMMISSIONER GENERAL OF INFORMATION, WHO DESPITE HIS INTELLIGENCE IS NEITHER LIKED, RESPECTED, NOR TRUSTED BY THE FOREIGN PRESS. IT IS WIDELY KNOWN IN THE PRESS CORPS THAT MR. NHA HIMSELF PERSONALLY APPROVES OR DISAPPROVES OF ALL VISA APPLICATIONS FROM JOURNALISTS, WHICH DOES VERY LITTLE TO INCREASE HIS LIKEABILITY AMONG NEWSMEN.

13. IT CAN PROBABLY BE SAFELY POSTULATED THAT IN VIEW OF PRESIDENT THIEU'S FORTHCOMING US VISIT AND HIS DESIRE TO EMBELLISH HIS IMAGE AND THAT OF VIETNAM, THE GVN WILL NOT APPLY GREAT PRESSURE
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AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN THE NEXT THREE OR FOUR WEEKS.
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INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 4138

14. AFTERWARDS, WHEN THE US TROOP WITHDRAWAL HAS BEEN COMPLETED, IT IS HAZARDOUS TO PREDICT GVN PRESS POLICIES. HOWEVER, THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE ARGUMENTS WHICH CAN BE MADE TO THE GVN TO ILLUSTRATE THE ADVANTAGES OF A RELATIVELY BENIGN POLICY TOWARD THE PRESS.

A. FIRST, THE GVN THROUGH TERRIBLE YEARS OF WAR HAS HAD AN EXTREMELY LIBERAL PRESS POLICY, AND HAS NOT EVEN IMPOSED CENSORSHIP EVEN THOUGH IT MIGHT JUSTIFIABLY HAVE DONE SO. HAVING ACHIEVED THIS MEASURE OF DEMOCRACY IN PRESS AFFAIRS, IT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE NOW FOR THE GVN TO APPLY A MORE STRINGENT PRESS POLICY AS THE NATION MOVES TOWARD PEACE.

B. SECONDLY, THE STILL LARGE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS IN SAIGON WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DIMINISH SUBSTANTIALLY BY THIS SUMMER. THIS WILL AUTOMATICALLY DECREASE THE MISCHIEF MAKING POTENTIAL OF THE PRESS, SINCE SCANDAL- SEARCH TAKES TIME, MONEY AND MANPOWER ALL OF WHICH WILL BE IN SHORTER SUPPLY THAN THEY HAVE BEEN FOR YEARS. THUS, WITH A LITTLE PATIENCE, THE GVN CAN LOOK FORWARD TO A SMALLER AND PROBABLY LESS OBSTREPEROUS PRESS CORPS THAN THAT WHICH THEY HAVE CONFRONTED FOR NEARLY TEN YEARS. IF SO, THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT FOR THE GVN TO COME DOWN HARD ON THE FOREIGN PRESS HERE.
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C. FINALLY, HARSH MEASURES BY THE GVN VIS- A- VIS THE FOREIGN PRESS EVEN OVER THE LONGER RUN CAN ONLY CAUSE PROBLEMS WHICH NEED NOT EXIST. THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, OTHER WESTERN NATIONS AND JAPAN ALL OF WHICH IT IS HOPED WILL BE IN A POSITION EVENTUALLY TO OFFER ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SOUTH VIETNAM, ARE ALL COUNTRIES IN WHICH THE PRESS OPERATES FREELY. A CRACKDOWN ON THE FOREIGN PRESS BY THE GCN WOULD AROUSE INDIGNATION IN THE PRESS OF THESE COUNTRIES WHICH IN TURN WOULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION AND THE LEGISLATURE, AND WOULD INCREASE THE DIFFICULTIES OF OBTAINING APPROPRIATIONS FOR AID PROJECTS TO BENEFIT VIETNAM.

15. WE BELIEVE THAT DURING PRESIDENT THIEU' S US VISIT THESE POINTS COULD BE USEFULLY MADE TO MR. NHA WITH THE HOPE THAT HE MIGHT KEEP THEM IN MIND IN FORMULATING GVN PRESS POLICY IN THE FUTURE.

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